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ABSTRACT

Black newspapers and journals published between 1827 and 1860, such as "Freedom's Journal," "The Weekly Advocate," and the "Mirror of Liberty," worked to dispel negative images and to set the record straight about women of color, in contrast to the unfounded hyperboles against these women which had been pervasive during the pre-Civil War years. The messages common to the black press and women were concerned primarily with the vindication and uplift of people of color. The relationship between the black press and black women was not oppressive but symbiotic, as the black press brought benefits to black women, and the women, in turn, brought financial and editorial support to the black press. Led by such men as Samuel Cornish, John Brown Russwurm, Frederick Douglas, David Ruggles, and Thomas Hamilton, the antebellum press was a forum for the social thought of women of color, daring to publish a variety of their literary, sociopolitical, moral and controversial commentary. Furthermore, the content of black newspapers and magazines depicted black women individually and collectively as concerned, expansive, socially aware and responsible, bearing witness to the fact that no other group of antebellum women worked with such spirit and persistence, in the face of so much despair and racism, to overcome so much--including unsavory images, oppression, slavery, and exploitation. This broader and more positive view of the black press regarding women should be taught in journalism history classes. (Forty-two footnotes are included.) (PRA)

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One view of antebellum black newspapers has it that these publications "preached the gospel of continued gender oppression even as they supported the struggle for social freedom."[1] This oppression view hinged on the notion that gender ideals of black society were "heavily influenced by middle class black males through the pages of black newspapers..."[2] Some credence has been given to the prospect that the men who wrote and edited black newspapers did so from a largely northern middle-class perspective.

Moreover, women who came to the pages of the press--that is had their activities reported in, wrote for, or advertised in black newspapers and journals--may have done so from the middle-class sphere. But the relationship of the black press to free women should not be characterized primarily as oppressive and the purpose of this article is to show why it should not.

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The interface between the black press and free women is best described as symbiotic if we are guided by the positive messages and advertising concerning women contained in the columns of black newspapers and journals. Overall, the messages reveal that the black press and women worked together for the uplift of the entire race, and this was true even as leading women sometimes disagreed with the style and tactics of black male leadership. Despite the degradation, despair, and rank racism to which free blacks in the north were subjected, the black press of the antebellum period was not lurid in its rhetoric, nor did it oppress women. It remained primarily a genteel and socially responsible press and its relationship to women is couched from this perspective.

The messages common to the black press and women were concerned primarily with the vindication and uplift of people of color. Moreover, the constructive work and benevolent activities of free women point to the responsibility of these females and was an appreciable part of the content of the black press. This was probably the case because editors wanted to dispel the myth of inferiority of the race and in this regard took pride in reporting that free women were

involved in constructive work and uplifting activities individually and in associations throughout their small black northern communities.

To advance a broader and more positive view of the black press regarding women, this article focuses on a variety of extant black newspapers and journals published from 1827 up to 1860. Essentially the fledgling black press was a source of encouragement and inspiration to free black women. When viewed in aggregate, it is clear that the newspapers and journals comprising this pre-Civil War ethnic press worked to dispel negative images and misinformation about free women. The black press during this period was a forum for the thoughts and sentiments of a few leading black women while it also provided other little-known free females a chance to vent their ideas on a variety of matters. Moreover, the alliance between the black press and the women was an important one, not only for the benefits it brought females of color, but also because black females brought small measures of financial and editorial support to the black press.

In addition to Freedom's Journal, The North Star, The Weekly Advocate, and The Aliened American--used earlier to frame the gender oppression view, the papers

and journals examined here include: The Mirror of Liberty, The Anglo-African Magazine, and The Weekly Anglo-African published in New York City; The Mystery, published in Pittsburgh; and The North Star, Frederick Douglass' Paper and Douglass' Monthly published in Rochester.

The view that the black press was actually supportive is underpinned by the knowledge that the negative views of black women were pervasive during the pre-Civil War years. While the entire race was plagued with the charge of inferiority, women were confronted with the haunting charge that they were not only inferior but also immoral. Through messages of women's successes and patterns of responsibility, black editors refuted notions of immorality and inferiority which had as their foundation the miscegenation and sexual exploitation inherent in America's slave economy. As a result of these charges, all Black women were forced to bear the brunt of the attendant negative social status connected with their color as well as with an image of immorality. The negative images of Black women were taught and passed on by whites, even to those from foreign shores.

Witness, as an example, the negative images passed on to an Englishman visiting America during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. On his first visit to America Isaac Candler saw in Northern communities, prejudice that was so strong that he likened it to "gangrene corrupting the whole."[3] Candler saw that if a white person walked arm-in-arm with a black on "Broadway or any other of the leading streets in New York he would probably be hooted and pelted by the populace."[4] But Candler's recollection of an episode in a Philadelphia boarding house where he resided is particularly useful as it depicts how touchy the subject of free black women and white men mingling had become. Candler's casual mention that "some of the prettiest girls"[5] he had seen in America were mulatto, apparently created a sensation at the boarding house were he was residing. And a further comment that he had once dined in the presence of a black woman evoked the wrath of Candler's white landlady who admonished him never to mention that fact again. In chiding Candler, the female proprietor let him know that comments showing favor to women of color had been inappropriate: "I thought it would be right to give you a hint for your future government [conduct]," she scowled.[6] It is the kind of negative image of black

females depicted in the preceding scenario that the black press worked to override with positive messages.

To round out the picture of negative images of black women during the pre-Civil War period, researchers Ottley and Weatherby have pointed to grogshops, like the Rat Pit and the Old Brewery in the notorious Five Point section of New York City. These were havens for cooperative black and white prostitution in the 1830s.[7] In an informal history of New York blacks based on manuscripts from the Federal Writer's Project, Ottley and Weatherby painted a pretty horrible picture of the Five Points community and particularly of the Old Brewery, a five-story dilapidated brewing plant, where "miscegenation was the rule; incest was not uncommon, and sexual promiscuity a prosaic matter between the races."[8]

Black newspapers did much to dispel misinformation and to set the record straight about people of color. For example, Freedom's Journal's response to grogshops like the Rat Pit was predictable when it lamented that such places were "nuisances to the community." But insolence to the sensibilities of white Americans was also apparent when the weekly charged with conviction that "association with dissipated whites, and the

allurements of the grogshops, are more ruinous to the lower class of our colour than any other vice."[9] This example from the first black newspaper in America is typical of evidence in other antebellum papers that black editors seized opportunities to encourage to vindicate women. In the preceding example, editors of Freedom's Journal, John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish simply refused to let black women, even those from the lower rungs of society, face accusations alone for prostitution and other ills associated with grogshops. Freedom's Journal was careful to point to a "lower class," an important distinction because middle-class black women apparently did not frequent grogshops and other such places. The evidence is that elite black women entertained at home or at church in their own club associations and societies.

Nearly ten years after the demise of Freedom's Journal, other black publications--short-lived and fledgling--continued to print positive commentary about women. The Weekly Advocate in an editorial commentary about women in 1837 explained its view that "in any enterprise for the improvement of our people--either moral, or mental--our hands would be palsied without woman's influence."[10] Women were called upon to "rouse

up and exert all their power, in encouraging and sustaining this effort." The work of the women was essential to show the world that there was virtue, talent, and intelligence in the black race. This was important from the perspective of black editors, given the pervasive charge of whites that people of color were inferior mentally, socially, and economically.

In its outreach to black females, the Mirror of Liberty, a provocative New York quarterly publication edited by David Ruggles was obviously pro women's rights. In July 1838 editor Ruggles began a special section of his journal intended exclusively for women. He called this section the "Ladies Mirror of Liberty." Ruggles explained his wish that the women's department of his paper would "always be open to the ladies." He was "sanguine that they [would] occupy it" and did not hesitate to write a kickoff poem for his new section entitled "Women's Rights" in which he demanded instant emancipation for women.[11] Though Ruggles invited the participation of women in his paper, there is little evidence from extant copies of the Mirror of Liberty that females of color actually capitalized on the opportunity to write to or for the short-lived

publication which was published sporadically from 1838-1840. The point, of course, is that Ruggles was willing to provide space for women in his journal. Considering the positive tone and content of his "Women's Rights" poem and other commentary Ruggles wrote about females, there can be no doubt that the short-lived Mirror of Liberty was further testament that the black press befriended women and reached out to them.

Just as black editors attempted to quell negative images of black women, the women gave support to their ethnic publications however and whenever possible. When, for instance, in 1837 Mary Adams Bright heard of the poor circulation problems confronting The Colored American, she took the opportunity to write a lengthy letter to the editor of that paper posted from Bangor, Maine. Her letter to the editor of The Colored American expressed strong sentiments in favor of the paper; the letter also included a three dollar contribution---an impressive gift during a year of financial panic and plight which plagued Americans at all echelons, particularly those of dark skin. Mary Bright wrote in October 1837, "I hail your excellent publication," one she described as "indispensable."[12]

While Mary Bright expressed regret that she did not have more to give, she was just one of many women who gave financial support to various units of the black press throughout the antebellum period.

Led by such men as Samuel Cornish, John Brown Russwurm, Frederick Douglass, David Ruggles, and Thomas Hamilton, the antebellum black press was practically the only forum for the social thought of women of color. What black women had to say about the plight of black people and what they thought was necessary for the uplift of the race was reported in a rich and diverse fashion. But rarely did the women stray too far from an agenda of uplift through education, temperance, industriousness, and prudence already set by black male leaders, many of whom were also editors during the antebellum period.

There is little evidence in the writing of black women found in the press that suggests they subscribed to the woman's-place-in-the-home tradition. When, for instance, an unknown woman named Matilda wrote to Freedom's Journal in August 1827, she felt close enough to the publication to assume that her provocative letter would be printed. In fact, the letter she wrote criticized the weekly for its laxity in espousing the

importance of education for women. "The influence that we have over the male sex demands," Matilda said "that our minds should be instructed and improved with the principles of education and religion, in order that this influence should be properly directed."[13] Matilda recommended that the daughters of black women ought to be encouraged to "devote leisure time to reading books" and other useful learning.[14] That Matilda's letter was published in Freedom's Journal is evidence that during the earliest stages of the black press, free women were provided a forum for evocative commentary on such topics as the education of women. That Freedom's Journal published Matilda's critical letter is in itself antithical to oppression.

Likewise, the fact that Frederick Douglass' paper The North Star permitted Mary Shadd Cary the opportunity to publish polemic commentary against black clergy in its columns falls far outside the parameters of gender oppression. A teacher, abolitionist and eventually a newspaper women herself, Mary A. Shadd, came first to the columns of The North Star when in March 1849 she wrote a bold letter reprinted in its entirety as it focused on the negligible work of black clergy. The essential fact is that she was permitted

by a black editor to express such a controversial view against black male clergy in one of the most widely circulated of all black papers.

The letter she wrote, addressed from Wilmington, Delaware, was a lengthy one in which many aspects of the poor condition of black life in America were confronted, but the most cogent comments were those which denounced black clergy for a lack of substance in their ministry to people of color. Neither clergy nor providence could help blacks out of their degraded social status in the view of Mary Shadd. Neither was help from the whites of the country the panacea for the ills and degradation of the race. Mary Shadd wrote and was a living example of her belief that self reliance was the key; she was cogently against what she described as the "frightfully wretched instruction" of black clergy. She wrote that influential clergy was "sapping our every means" and spreading ignorance and superstition in the process.[15]

Frederick Douglass' newspaper dared to published Mary Shadd's commentary, though it was acerbic and, perhaps to some, even considered blasphemous. Despite her outspokenness, there is no evidence that Mary Shadd Cary was a victim of gender oppression in the black

press. Quite the contrary is true. Cary eventually became a staunch supporter of emigration to Canada for free blacks and fugitive slaves. And when she took up residence in Chatham, near Toronto, she not only established the first integrated school[16] but also helped to establish the Provincial Freeman a black newspaper devoted to "emigration, temperance, antislavery and general literature."[17] Although Mary Shadd bore a title other than publishing agent, "she was regarded as the editor of The Provincial Freeman."[18] Under her editorship, advertisements for The Provincial Freeman continued to appear in The Weekly Anglo-African, The Aliened American and other black newspapers in America. This fact underscores the encouragement that leading women such as Cary received from the black press.

A few free women were intimately connected with black newspapers and journals. There is evidence, for instance, that Frances Ellen Watkins and Sarah Douglass were editorial associates who wrote regularly for The Anglo-African Magazine, a monthly journal edited by Thomas Hamilton and published at 48 Beekman Street in New York City. The women wrote a variety of literary, sociopolitical and moral commentary. Brief discussion

here of the diversity and provocativeness of Watkins and Douglass' writing is further attestment that the black press was not oppressive of women. A poet and teacher, Watkins was also critical of black male leadership. In her treatise "Our Greatest Want" found in the May 1959 issue of The Anglo-African Magazine, she used a foundation of human brotherhood to suggest that she was against the notion that the "greatest need of [black] people at present is money and that money is a symbol of power,..."[19] Watkins said she did not subscribe to a popular notion that the possession of money would gain for people of color "the rights which power and prejudice" denied them. Neither did she believe "intelligence" to be "the greatest want." Rather, she pointed to a view that was not widely held, not widely discussed, and, to some degree at odds with the sociopolitical goals set by black leaders during the Negro Convention movement to uplift blacks in America.

Watkins said the essential need of her people was, somehow, deeper than "gold or knowledge." "We want more soul, a higher cultivation of all our spiritual faculties. We need more unselfishness, earnestness and integrity," she explained. Watkins' treatise was an

insightful one indeed as she went on to suggest that her people lacked leadership--lacked a "Moses" to deliver them--a notion that could not possibly have rested well with self-professed black leaders and editors of the black press such as Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany, or Henry Highland Garnet--men who had themselves found it necessary to scatter both geographically and ideologically during the turbulence of the 1850's. Yet, Watkins, like Mary Shadd Cary, was permitted to have her say in a publication edited by a black man, a say that she probably would not have been permitted to publish in establishment newspapers and magazines of the era.

Frances Watkins' expansiveness in intellect and creativity was not expressed solely in her social thought. Her poetry as revealed in the black press was outstanding then and would probably be reviewed as such now in contemporary literature. In 1859 she published three distinctive literary pieces in The Anglo-African Magazine. The first was a ten-verse poem entitled "Gone to God" in which she focused on the death of a woman, obviously black, who had lived such a hard and demanding life that death became as freedom for her.[20] "The Dying Fugitive" may have been a companion piece to

"Gone to God" because in this latter poem Watkins focused on the death of a fugitive slave, a man this time, who had been eluded by freedom that he only found in death, apparently at the hands of whites who captured him.[21] In both poems the implication of the quest for freedom by people of color in America was overwhelming. Her final literary piece for The Anglo-African Magazine that year was "Two Offers" a short story steeped in morality.[22] Here Watkins focused on the advice of a mother to her young daughter who was undecided about two proposals for marriage. Mother's advice was to avoid both suitors. It appears that much of Watkins' writing focused on issues of social morality and freedom for her people.

Sarah M. Douglass, teacher and lecturer, also wrote for The Anglo-African Magazine and in 1859 published a treatise entitled "A Good Habit Recommended" in which she focused on the importance of "storing the memory of children early with scripture truths."[23] Douglas, a Philadelphia Quaker, reasoned that teaching children from the biblical scriptures at an early age would be like the "reception of seed into the ground, which might lie a long while dormant," but "in due time would, nevertheless spring up and bear

fruit abundantly." Douglass made her mark as an educator, lecturer, and antislavery worker and organizer. Her work did not go unnoticed by the black press. Douglass was the subject of a front-page letter to the editor featured in The Weekly Anglo-African in December 1859. Written by a person signing only the initials "J. J.," Sarah Douglass was praised in the letter as a "warmhearted, self-sacrificing, intelligent advocate of the rights of her own race."[24] Mrs. Douglass (unrelated to Frederick Douglass) was lauded as a fine teacher and principal of the preparatory division of the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia who enjoyed "the friendship and respect of many, very many, prominent friends of the cause."[25] She was described as a reserved woman of "intelligence and refinement" who had also studied for several terms at one of the female medical colleges in Philadelphia. As a result of her medical studies, Douglass also offered lectures on the subject of physiology to women of Philadelphia.

Coverage in black newspapers of the meetings and accomplishments of female organizations such as the Dorcas Society, a group formed in New York to aid poor children, is an example of the self-help activities

spurred by black women and aimed to help in the overall goal of vindication of the race. This type of women's community work was revealed in the black press routinely throughout the antebellum years. Because black newspapers and journals operated on shoestring budgets and very limited editorial staffs, much of what is known to have been the work of black women obviously did not reach the columns of the publications. But there is enough coverage of women's work in a variety of organizations to reveal a close-knit and symbiotic relationship between these groups and the black press. Such coverage also bespeaks the overall patterns of responsibility exhibited by the women. A few other examples of the positive activities and work of women featured in black newspapers will augment this point.

In January 1828 the "females of colour" met in New York City at the Manumission Society's schoolroom on Mulberry Street to detail plans and appoint a committee to begin work to aid needy children of the city.[26] Immediately, after the committee was formed, guidelines were drawn up which addressed not only the functions of the society, but also the concern that all the group's members be of "good moral character." At that meeting, which was reported fully in Freedom's Journal, the

women also concerned themselves, rather meticulously, with matters of potential meeting places, organizational structure, dues to be assessed and so on. They insisted that all donated clothing items for the children be "properly adjusted, repaired, made up or altered" with the supervision of the Dorcas Board.[27] The women divided themselves into sewing classes. It was not enough for them to merely collect and accept old clothing, Freedom's Journal reported that they were driven to have the items cleaned and repaired before passing them on. Taxing themselves dues of twelve and a half cents or twenty-five cents at each semiannual meeting, the women's primary concern was to help children and to "promote a regular attendance at school" by all they aided. The detail reported of the work of the Dorcas Society women in Freedom's Journal is typical of such coverage in other black newspapers and journals. What such detailed coverage suggests is that the black editors took the work of women seriously as it reflected the best of the race and the responsibility of black women to help their own.

Patterning themselves after the women of Boston who had raised money to support antislavery newspapers there, the "coloured ladies" of Cincinnati and

Cleveland began to organize fairs and bazaars in 1849 to aid the North Star in its antislavery work.[28] They were not alone; antislavery fairs and bazaars were sponsored in most of the free states by both black and white women, usually working in segregated groups. Black newspapers sanctioned and reported the work of both groups.

The responsibility and cooperative spirit shown by the Philadelphia black women and reported in The North Star was an echo of that shown by groups in New York, Cincinnati and other cities. It was also an example of mutualism that existed between a black women's organization and editors of the black press. In 1849, The Women's Association of Philadelphia was begun with the help of the illustrious Dr. Martin Delany, a black physician, an intellectual and editor of Pittsburgh's only pre-Civil War black paper, The Mystery. Delany, who also worked for a short while as a co-editor with Frederick Doulgass of The North Star, was also an antislavery advocate who eventually espoused separatism and colonization as fitting denouement for pre-Civil War free blacks. The Philadelphia group organized at the residence of Rachel Lloyd, at 303 Pine Street, with explicit direction from Delany who addressed the first

meeting by presenting "principles upon which an organization of this character should be based."[29] With obvious hardihood, Delany presented the women with a model constitution which they readily accepted. In that constitution, the women focused on the need for the support of the black press and public lectures as the most powerful tools for the self-elevation of the black race. From The North Star's account, the women were extraordinarily detailed in their guidelines to the officers of their organization. Apparently, Martin Delany attended the meeting as an invited guest or consultant to help the women organize their civic club.

In Delany's own short-lived paper, The Mystery, he seized opportunities to applaud women for their humanitarian and church work, for teaching black youth and for other successes. In December 1846, for instance, he used his paper to praise Julia Ann Tillman and Ann Maria Johnson for their "inimitable French worsted raised needle work." In the same issue, a soiree planned and orchestrated by Eliza Lewis and Sarah Allen in Uniontown, Pennsylvania to benefit the African Methodist church was reported in The Mystery.[30]

The community work of individual black women was not reported in abundance in the columns of black

newspapers and journals. Rather, the focus in reporting women's activities was usually their work in organizations and small groups. This may have been so because there were no reporting staffs to send out to cover individuals involved in community work. Black newspapers must have often relied on officers of women's organizations to let them know what was happening when staffs were not adequate to cover these groups. Nevertheless, there are instances of outstanding work of individual women reported in the black press.

The good deeds of Kathy Ferguson may serve as an example of the superior work of an individual that was reported. We get only a glimpse Kathy Ferguson, a little known New York City black woman who had her work singled out in a laudatory article in Frederick Douglass' Paper. In this instance, the praise came posthumously. Charitable, folksy, and "simple-hearted," Kathy did not advertise her talent as a cake baker for weddings in the columns of black newspapers; she probably didn't need to. But a few months after she died of cholera on July 11, 1854, Frederick Douglass' Paper said in an article about her that her work as a baker was "celebrated."[31] The paper

said she embodied the spirit of a Christian and was a true American despite the fact that she had been a slave until age 16.

Kathy had, according to Frederick Douglass' Paper, probably begun the first black Sabbath School [Sunday School] in New York City and had taken into her home at various times forty homeless or destitute children, twenty of whom were white. She had either brought them up herself or had attempted to find them homes with caring families. Kathy "gave away all she earned beyond that needed for her own support."[32]
In Kathy Ferguson we note black press coverage of a little known women not only "celebrated" for her work as a baker, but also praised by a black editor for her community spirit and her work with youth, black and white.

The Weekly Anglo-African's coverage of black women's response to the bereaved widow of John Brown following the martyr's hanging for the Harper's Ferry raid also images the caring, responsible and expansive nature of black women that was captured in the pages of their press. Black women from all echelons empathized with Mary Ann Brown and rallied around her following the hanging of her husband for the raid on Harper's

Ferry. Essentially all black women saw the Brown family as their comrades in the struggle for freedom and vindication. Therefore when John Brown died, black women were able to put aside their own plight long enough to raise money and show concern for someone for whom they cared. The martyr's widow, Mary Brown, was outside the immediate social circles of New York City black women, yet they reached out to her. In a touching and elegant public letter published in the Weekly Anglo-African, the women vowed to "minister" to Brown's widow and to her family until she said "enough."[33] These women of color showed remarkable initiative and concern; they saw themselves as the Mary Brown's sisters in oppression. In the last portion of the lengthy letter written to Mary Brown, the women vowed to stick by her as long as she needed them. Black women started a fund for her and told of their plan to "minister" to her. Black women committed themselves to help Mary Brown financially until she said "enough."[34]

Evidence that black editors used their newspapers and magazines in the struggle to vindicate and uplift women is also revealed in a variety of commentary and letters to the editors selected for publication. For

instance, a male subscriber writing to The North Star about black women thought they were ostensibly caring and had a sense of responsibility toward their communities. In an article entitled "What Can A Woman Do" appearing in The North Star, correspondent Richard Hildreth explained his conviction that "moral power" had "gradually softened and humanized the more favored portion of the race."[35] He added "women share it equally [moral power] with men." Hildreth lamented the fact that a true history of the race remained to be written, but he was sure women would eventually play a significant role. He applauded the work of women in churches, associations and charities and cogently reminded readers that female church members "far outnumber the men." He commented that women were usually the ones who influenced men to attend. Hildreth's view, printed by a black editor, was probably selected for print because it too was antithetical to the negative images of black females that was so prevalent during the era.

There is evidence in all three of Frederick Douglass's pre-Civil War publications to indicate they were not primarily oppressive in language about women. By 1859, Douglass Monthly was echoing its predecessors

The North Star and Frederick Douglass' Paper both in its positive tone and in its coverage of women's activities. All of Douglass's publications covered the community and antislavery work of black and white women, though the women's actual work was often accomplished in segregated groups. Frederick Douglass himself was a strong supporter of women's rights and his work in this regard has been well documented.[36] In February 1859 for example, he featured one of many articles about the constructive work of women. Douglass Monthly, in this instance, featured a short piece about a celebration planned by the women of Syracuse to laud the J. W. Loguen family's work with the Underground Railroad. The feature lauded the women for "wishing to share" and for their work "in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked..."[37] This is further attestment to black women's responsibility toward their people and their communities. Ironically this work was usually accomplished without apparent bitterness and hostility, and in the full spirit of America's democratic ideals which continued to elude black women and the entire race throughout the nineteenth century.

The lore of northern free women is that they produced a significant portion of their families' incomes. Indeed black women's work has always been part of the American economy.[38] Mostly free black females worked in menial jobs as agricultural workers and domestic servants. But some of the women were also self-employed and continually striving for some degree of personal and financial independence. These women sought and sometimes created creative and interesting jobs. They took obvious pride in the creative careers and small businesses they carved out for themselves. Judging from the coverage of their work and advertisements regarding the same, black newspapers encouraged black women in their business pursuits and careers by making available to them space in which to advertise their talents, services, and wares.

Perhaps unusual in her profession and in her success, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield is an example of the talent and pioneering spirit among black women that was revealed in antebellum black papers. Greenfield became a guitarist and renowned singer with the help of a female Quaker mentor in Philadelphia who also gave her the name Greenfield. Known as "The Black Swan," Greenfield was eventually "adopted" by the city of

Buffalo and went on to study in Europe and to sing at Buckingham Palace for Queen Victoria. In later life she gave voice lessons in Philadelphia.

Just prior to one of Greenfield's European concert tours, she sang for an all white audience in New York's Metropolitan Hall, an appearance for which she was eventually chided in an editorial appearing in Frederick Douglass' Paper in April 1853.[39] But upon hearing of the arrangements for the Metropolitan Hall concert, the Reverend J.W.C. Pennington, abolitionist and co-editor of the Cleveland black weekly, The Aliened American, approached Greenfield about the possibility of offering a charity concert exclusively for colored citizens at the Broadway Tabernacle. Of course, she gave the concert for black citizens. In a public letter appearing in reprint in The Aliened American, Miss Greenfield's reply to the invitation was gracious.[40]

She was happy to sing at a benefit for her own race. A black editor was responsible for the invitation and the arrangements, and a black newspaper carried Greenfield's public letter agreeing give the concert. Miss Greenfield's was probably atypical of black female success during the years before the Civil War. But a

number of the women were involved in trying to improve themselves and in quelling the pervasive views of inferiority through progressive community work as well as creative employment. That these women and free blacks as a whole managed to progress in antebellum America is remarkable and even surprising since they suffered so much in the face of political and social rebuffs growing out of slavery and racism. In the field of music for instance, some free women were involved in teaching voice and instrumental music in their homes. The women were talented enough to also be in demand to sing at church and social events. All sorts of examples of free women's creative work can be found in the columns of black newspapers. Miss A. E. Freeman, for instance, taught music at her home according to The Weekly Anglo-African, while vocalists Miss O. A. Hamilton and Miss A. Hector of Troy gave fund raising concerts.[41] Some other free females taught black youth and adult education. Others made hats, operated dress making establishments or set up what were advertised as genteel boarding establishments.[42] These establishments were sprinkled throughout the northeast but were especially advertised in black newspapers in urban areas such as New York City and Philadelphia.

What the variety of continued advertisements from women suggests is that some females were working diligently to become career independent and to overcome the routine washerwoman, domestic-worker track to which they had been relegated. What little the women were able to accomplish was no doubt the result of dogged persistence, hard work and remarkable responsibility as it has been documented that they lived and worked in the most racist and unreasonable economic, social, and legal circumstances.

Messages and images from the black press, in contrast with some of the unfounded hyperboles against black women, reinforce the multidimensional aspects of these females. The black press, its editors and women worked together to help each other. The content of black newspapers and magazines depicts antebellum women of colour individually and collectively as concerned, expansive, socially aware and responsible. Amid all sorts of degradation, some black women were able to respond to the social problems and challenges of their times. They worked, not only in domestic and agricultural jobs, but also in creative and meaningful business endeavors which put a few of them in control of their livelihoods. They formed societies to help

not only in the antislavery cause but also to help themselves, underprivileged children and, remarkably, others like John Brown's widow.

The black press was witness then to what we can only sense now through its firsthand accounts: No other group of antebellum women worked with such spirit and persistence, in the face of so much despair and racism, to overcome so much--including unsavory images, oppression, slavery, and exploitation. Black newspapers during the antebellum period worked toward positive images of free women and to quell the negative and oppressive images which shrouded these females. In this sense, the relationship between the black press and black women was not oppressive; it was symbiotic.

NOTES

"Free Women and the Antebellum Black Press:
Gender Oppression Reconsidered"

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4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 284.

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7. Roi Ottley and William J. Weatherby, The Negro in New York: An Informal History, 1626-1940 (New York: Prager Publications, 1967), 76-77.

8. Ibid., 77.

9. Freedom's Journal, (New York City), July 20, 1828.

10. The Weekly Advocate,(New York City), January 7, 1837.

11. Mirror of Liberty, (New York City) July 1838.

12. The Colored American (New York City), October 21, 1837.

13. Freedom's Journal, July 20, 1828.

14. Ibid.

15. The North Star (Rochester, New York), March 23, 1849.

16. Leon Litwack and August Meier, eds. Black Leaders in the Nineteenth Century, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 90.

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20. Ibid., "Gone to God," April 1859.

21. Ibid., "The Dying Fugitive," August 1859.

22. Ibid., "Two Offers," September 1859.

23. Ibid., "A Good Habit Recommended," December 1859.

24. The Weekly Anglo-African (New York City), December 31, 1959.

25. Ibid.

26. Freedom's Journal, January 9, 1828.

27. Ibid., March 7, 1828. (Also see other

28. The North Star (Rochester, New York), February 19, 1848.

29. Ibid., March 9, 1849.

30. The Mystery, (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) December 16, 1846.

31. Frederick Douglass' Paper, (Rochester, New York), December 22, 1854.

32. Ibid.

33. The Weekly Anglo-African, December 3, 1859.

34. Ibid.

35. The North Star, January 26, 1849.

36. See Philip S. Foner's book, Frederick Douglass on Women's Rights, (Westport, Connecticut, 1976) for a remarkable recap of Douglass' writings on the subject of women's rights.

37. Douglass' Monthly, (Rochester, New York), February 1959.

38. Barbara Mayer Wertheimer, We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 122.

39. Frederick Douglass' Paper, April 8, 1853.

40. The Aliened American, (Cleveland, Ohio), April 9, 1853.

41. See The Weekly Anglo-African's brief classified section for these listings, December 10 and 17, 1859.

42. For examples of boarding establishments run by women see: Mrs. C. Ramsey's Boarding House advertisement in Pittsburgh's black weekly The Mystery, December 16, 1846; Mrs. S. Babcock advertised her New York boarding establishment in San Francisco's pre-Civil War black weekly, Mirror of the Times on December 12, 1857; and as early as May 5, 1828, Gracy Jones began a series of advertisements for her Philadelphia boarding establishment in Freedom's Journal.